

RANK

193

of his village, hence they will not feel it incumbent upon them to intervene. But news travels, and in course of time the *susaok* members of some other tribe will decide to send a raiding party against X's village. All informants agreed most emphatically that this custom prevailed among the coast people from the Tsimshian country to Alert Bay, but specific examples could not be obtained. The Bella Coola regard such a raid as the proper course to pursue, and belligerent tribes may have used an irregularity in the potlatch rites as an excuse for an assault. It is clear, however, that this custom never attained such prominence that it could be called a law.

The following is an instance of the Bella Coola outlook on the question:

The father of an informant had had such success in giving potlatches that his neighbours were jealous. On one occasion he prepared a representation of a whale, an elaborate wooden frame, fifteen feet long, operated by men concealed within and carrying passengers; this was a figure which entered into his ancestral myth. One of the carpenters who made it, bribed by a jealous rival of the donor of the potlatch, arranged that the lower jaw of the whale should fall to the floor during the proceedings. This revealed the mechanism of the structure. White influence on the coast prevented an incursion of foreign raiders, but according to this informant, the chiefs determined that his father should die, and they employed a sorcerer for this purpose. His father and eleven other relatives died soon afterwards. This man, the sole survivor, ascribes his escape to his adoption of Christianity.

Another instance of the penalty which follows errors in potlatch ritual occurred a few years ago, when a number of young men used the cone-shaped whistles openly, as if they had been toys. The presence of the white man prevented any open steps towards punishment, but before long all the youths died. No one knows what caused their deaths, though probably they were due to an expert in black magic acting on the instructions of a senior *susaok*.

After the prayer, X and his family give more food to their guests, whose boxes containing what they are to carry away are increasing in number. By his lavishness, X increases his prestige in the eyes of his fellow-villagers.

If he can afford to build a new house embodying the form

556*
688
628556*
688

[578]

[532]

[578]

[177]

[754]

[534]

[177]

[754]

556*

[335]●

● 335 of one in his ancestral myth, he will do so; if not, it will suffice
* 556 to decorate the old house; but in either case the tasks connected with the construction must be allotted. X gives to one man the work of making new beams; to another, the two front upright posts; to a third, the two rear upright posts; to another, the planks along one side of the house; to a skilled carpenter, the totem-pole bearing whatever design X has decided upon; to a painter, one of the designs for the back wall of the house; to another painter, another design near it; to still another, part of the painting of the front of the house; to another, more of the same; and so on until he has allotted work for every part of the edifice. In some cases there are peculiarities of house construction dependent upon their occurrence in the builder's ancestral myth, which are jealously guarded prerogatives. One man, for instance, enjoys the right to build five peaks above the front of his house. These represent the five peaks of Mount *Nusqalst* where his first ancestor came to earth (see Plate 13). Another has a series of spool- or disk-like indentations in his upright posts (see Plate 14) to support the beams, a prerogative established by his ancestor *Qeil* in the beginning of time. Another chief's posts are carved to represent a mythical creature. Still another prerogative is that of building a sloping board, resembling a gang-plank, from the door of the house to the ground, with a representation of a mythological sea monster at the bottom. In that case the theme of the grandiloquent potlatch song is how chiefs are attracted to X's house, as canoes are irresistibly drawn to the sea monster.

Each of the above-mentioned prerogatives belongs to one family alone; whereas several have the right to build semi-subterranean houses. The artisans excavate a rectangular hole, about six feet deep, equal in size to the central part of the dwelling. A platform is then erected round the sides of this, about three feet from the bottom. The walls of the house itself are raised sufficiently far back from the central pit to allow an unencumbered passageway, off which the bedrooms

are built. The central fire is laid in the bottom of the pit, a few feet above that is the platform where the guests are seated, and the ground-level is a few feet above that again. A few instances are remembered of houses having been built with two, and even three, of these tiers, or platforms: In those cases it appears certain that this type of construction was embodied in a myth derived from Bella Bella or Rivers Inlet people, where, according to the Bella Coola, large houses, of five or six tiers, were not unknown. 342
424
556*
[177]

X uses his own discretion in choosing his workmen,¹ avoiding only his own relatives and those of his wife. The question of pay is never broached, but it is understood that X will recompense those who have worked for him. The scale on which he does so will depend entirely on his generosity. This is one of the ways in which a chief helps the poor people of his village. More food is distributed to "sharpen the wedges." 335 ●
556*
465

While a man is engaged on his allotted task any food or other articles which he or his family may obtain belongs to X. If a man who hews the planks takes his wife with him and she chances to pick berries while he is at work, these must be given to X who will distribute them with his other food at the potlatch, and it will be announced from whom he has received them. If a man's friends should help him to complete his task and then all go hunting, any skins acquired will belong to X; but when he repays his indebtedness he is expected to reward the worker, not only for his carpentry, but also for the berries or pelts. As X must give lavishly to prove his chief-like generosity, the collection of foods or skins by his workmen is profitable for them.

The guests have been passing in and out of X's house all day and towards dusk all again assemble within. Suddenly the door is burst open by a number of young men carrying a large log, like a battering-ram. The majority of the bearers are *sasak*, though they may obtain assistance from those who are not members of the society. The people within the house spring up to eject the ram, and a sham battle ensues. Back- 556*
[575]

¹ [i.e. to build a new house for a potlatch.

-ANALYST]

FEATURES ASSOCIATED WITH THE POTLATCH 269

THE PROFESSION OF CARPENTER

As with singers, there are many carpenters who ply their trade without the advantage of an ancestral prerogative. They, also, may be expert and receive credit for their skill, but they can never achieve quite the distinction that comes to a man who has been made a carpenter by the distribution of presents. The latter may be so clumsy with tools that no one would ever trust him to make a canoe, or even a mask; but he is, socially, a carpenter, whereas a skilled artisan lacking a prerogative is admired for his ability but has no foundation of social esteem. In transmitting a professional carpenter's name, however, an effort is always made to give it to a youth with a bent in that direction. 335 424 463 555 [553]

The most esteemed carpenters are those who can make canoes, a trade which requires no special prerogative. In the beginning of time, *Yulätimut* was the canoe-maker *par excellence*; he assisted many of the first people, and no one can have a professional prerogative as carpenter unless this supernatural being appears in his ancestral myth. The Bella Coola ascribe the skill of the Bella Bella in carpentry to the fact that *Yulätimut* married a Bella Bella woman in the early period of the world and that many of that tribe are his descendants. In the old days, before the coming of the white men, carpenters were always respected as esteemed members of the community. Chiefs always cared for them, and they received abundant food at every ceremonial. None the less, they were not wealthy, and only in recent years, since the Bella Coola have realized the value put upon good craftsmanship by the white men, has it become customary to give valuable presents to carpenters. Ceremonially, they have considerable influence, since the carpenter who makes a mask usually decides who shall wear it and takes charge of the fitting and adjustment. He is also held responsible for any accident such as its falling when in use or for mechanical defects. 335 773 [829] 335 [554] [777] [532]